

Independent Study: The History of Human Rights in the Modern World

HIST 4399-060 – Fall 2025

3 Credit Hours

Dr. Colin Snider

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Office Hours:

Mondays, 10:00-12:00

Tuesdays, 11:00-1:30

Or by appointment

Description

Independent study in specific areas of history not covered by organized undergraduate courses. A maximum of six credit hours for independent study courses may be applied toward an undergraduate degree.

Objectives

This class examines the history of human rights – particularly in the 20th and 21st century – to develop both a broad global history of human rights and to identify ways the past and present connect. Drawing on a variety of both primary and secondary readings, this course will provide you with both a wide breadth of content on human rights and on world history while also allowing you to develop your own critical analysis of human rights, their challenges, their possibilities, and their varied meanings in the modern world. In the process, you will continue to develop your abilities in critical thinking, analysis, and writing, while also applying an understanding of historical processes to the world, both past and present, at the local, national, and global levels. Thus, by the end of the semester:

- You will develop critical thinking skills that reflect an ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information while improving creative thinking, innovation, and inquiry.
- You will develop communication skills that reflect the ability to develop, interpret, and express their own ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.
- You will develop a sense of social responsibility that reflects intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in local, regional, national, and global communities.
- You will develop a sense of personal responsibility that the ability to connect individual choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

More specifically, in accordance with the Student Learning Outcomes as they pertain to the material in this course, you will:

- develop a familiarity with the basic history of human rights from ancient times to the present;
- identify, describe, and differentiate key components and definitions of human rights in the world in the 20th and 21st centuries;
- identify and analyze the ways people have mobilized around questions of or asserted human rights understand;
- contextualize the ways human rights violations occur at different moments and in different societies throughout the recent past;
- develop your own understanding of the strengths and limitations of varying definitions of

and struggles over human rights, and you will apply this understanding to contemporary issues in the world;

- describe, analyze, and evaluate the key scholarly debates and schools of thought on human rights in the modern world; and
- recognize, apply, examine, and assess the types of conceptual frameworks, narrative methods, and theoretical tools available to scholars of human rights and apply them to your own understanding of historical analysis and of human rights.

Required Readings

You are required to complete all the readings for the course, with an average of 125 pages per week reading spread throughout the semester. The readings for this course are:

Arditti, Rita. *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina*. University of California Press, 1999.

Hatzfeld, Jean. *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak*. Translated by Linda Coverdale. Other Press, 2007.

Ibrahim, Azeem. *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Genocide*. Hurst, 2018.

Kurnaz, Matt. *Five Years of My Life: An Innocent Man in Guantanamo*.

Sfad, Michael. *The Wall and the Gate: Israel, Palestine, and the Legal Battle for Human Rights*. Metropolitan Books, 2018.

Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N., Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn B. Young, eds. *Human Rights and Revolutions*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

Course Requirements:

I. Attendance and Participation – We will meet weekly to trace the general history of human rights, provide narrative details and scholarly approaches to the case studies, and discuss the readings. Given the breadth of knowledge covered, attendance is required; in the event something occurs that prevents you from meeting, we will work to reschedule promptly so as to not fall behind. Attendance and Participation are worth **20% of your final grade**.

II. Written assignments:

Given the focus on human rights in recent history and the past's connection to the present, you will write six short essays (1000-1250 words) throughout the semester, corresponding with the content and reading of each unit identified in the Course Schedule (below). These papers will integrate the narrative content of each unit with the assigned readings. The content of these papers will focus on particular questions and themes that we identify in the course of our meetings, and can include, but are not limited to: a comparison of a particular human rights case to the broader history of human rights; a comparison of differing case studies that we deal with throughout the semester; an analysis of the historically lived experiences of our case studies and their implications for human rights; the application of historical phenomena to broader philosophical and legal understandings of human rights; and/or other questions to be identified by you and the faculty member in the course of the semester. These papers will be due in weeks 2, 5, 8, 11, 13, and 15, are worth **75% total (12.5% each)** of your final grade.

Additionally, for the final week, you will write a self-reflective piece of 300-500 words in which you consider what you have learned, what ideas/experiences/definitions/understandings of

human rights have resonated with you more (and which have resonated less) and why, and identify your own understanding of human rights and their application based on what you have learned across the semester. This reflection will be due during Finals Week, and will be worth **5% of your final grade**.

Writing Assignment Deadlines: Life happens. If illness, extenuating circumstances or special learning needs prevent submission of written work on time, please speak to me in advance of the due date. Unexcused late submissions will result in a deduction of one letter grade (10%) per day late. Papers more than one week late will receive an **automatic zero (0) for the assignment** and will not be graded.

Grades

Based on the assignments outlined above, students' grades will be determined on the traditional grading scale (A: 90-100%; B: 80-89%; C: 70-79%; D: 60-69%; F: 0-59%) and will break down as follows:

Attendance and Participation	20.0%
Unit 1 Short Essay (due week 2)	12.5%
Unit 2 Short Essay (due week 5)	12.5%
Unit 3 Short Essay (due week 8)	12.5%
Unit 4 Short Essay (due week 11)	12.5%
Unit 5 Short Essay (due week 13)	12.5%
Unit 6 Short Essay (due week 15)	12.5%
<u>Self-Reflection (due Finals Week)</u>	<u>5.0%</u>
TOTAL	100.0%

Academic Integrity

In line with university policies and procedures, **any and all cases of plagiarism or collusion will result in an automatic 0 (zero) for the assignment**. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit. Collusion includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty. Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. For the full description of policies and procedures on scholastic dishonesty at UT Tyler, see <https://www.uttyler.edu/mopp/documents/8-student-conduct-discipline-final.pdf>.

Course Policies on Artificial Intelligence

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty

and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

While AI has utility in some types of work, for the purposes of the types of analytical work we will be engaging in this Independent Study, **AI is not permitted in this course at all.** I expect all work you submit for this course to be your own. The purpose of these assignments is to provide your own original analysis while engaging with the process of producing knowledge through your own analysis. Doing your own work, without human or artificial intelligence assistance, is best for your efforts in engaging with the human past and in developing skills that machines cannot replicate. For this course, I expressly forbid using ChatGPT or any other artificial intelligence (AI) tools for any stages of the work process, including brainstorming. Deviations from these guidelines will be considered a violation of UT Tyler's Honor Code and academic honesty values and will result in an automatic 0 (zero) for the assignment with no chance for resubmission and with referral to Student Affairs for academic dishonesty.

Course Schedule

Unit 1: Human Rights across History

Reading: Wasserstrom, Jeffrey N., Greg Grandin, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn B. Young, eds. *Human Rights and Revolutions*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

- Week 1: The History of Human Rights up to the 20th Century
- Week 2: General Trends in Human Rights in the 20th Century
Discussion of *Human Rights and Revolutions*
Short Paper 1 Due

Unit 2: Human Rights in the Cold War

Reading: Arditti, Rita. *Searching for Life: The Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina*. University of California Press, 1999.

- Week 3: The Development of Human Rights Movements in the 1960s-1980s
- Week 4: Human Rights and Argentina's 1976-1983 Military Regime
- Week 5: Human Rights, Science, and Memory
Discussion of *Searching for Life*
Short Paper 2 Due

Unit 3: Genocide in the Late 20th Century

Reading: Hean Hatzfeld, *Life Laid Bare: The Survivors in Rwanda Speak*. Translated by Linda Coverdale. Other Press, 2007.

- Week 6: Genocide and Human Rights in the Post-Cold War Setting
- Week 7: The Rwandan Genocide
- Week 8: Surviving Genocide
Discussion of *Life Laid Bare*
Short Paper 3 Due

Unit 4: Human Rights in West Asia

Reading: Sfad, Michael. *The Wall and the Gate: Israel, Palestine, and the Legal Battle for Human Rights*. Metropolitan Books, 2018.

- Week 9: Questions of Rights in the Twenty-First Century
- Week 10: Struggles for Rights in West Asia
- Week 11: Defining Human Rights in West Asia
Discussion of *The Wall and the Gate*
Short Paper 4 Due

Unit 5: Genocide in the 21st Century

Reading: Ibrahim, Azeem. *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Genocide*. Hurst, 2018.

- Week 12: Contemporary Human Rights Questions in the 21st Century
- Week 13: Forms of Genocide in the Contemporary World
Discussion of *The Rohingyas*
Short Paper 5 Due

Unit 6: Human Rights and the “War on Terror”

Reading: Kurnaz, Matt. *Five Years of My Life: An Innocent Man in Guantanamo*.

- Week 14: Thanksgiving Break [no meeting]
- Week 15: The US, the “War on Terror,” and Human Rights
Discussion of *Five Years of My Life*
Short Paper 6 Due

Postscript: Reflection on Human Rights

- Finals Week: Self-Reflective Essay due